

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 5319

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SY LE IS

SUBJ: ISRAELI VIEW OF SYRO-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT, CHANGE IN SYRIAN
GOVERNMENT AND EFFECT ON THE PLO

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 5163, (B) DAMASCUS 5080 (C) DAMASCUS 5082

BEGIN SUMMARY: ISRAELI OFFICIALS AND OBSERVERS SEE THE RECENT
CHANGE IN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AS A SIGN THAT FIRMNESS IS
GOING TO BE NEEDED IN DAMASCUS. THEY REGARD THE NEW SYRO-
PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT AS UNLIKELY TO LAST LONG, BUT ITS TERMS
AND THE VERY FACT THAT IT WAS SIGNED ARE INDICATIONS OF SYRIAN
STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF MIDDLE EAST AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
AFFAIRS IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (BARNEA) TOLD US THAT
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HE FEELS IT IS TOO EARLY TO ASSESS ACCURATELY THE IMPLICATIONS

OF THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT IN DAMASCUS. HIS INITIAL REACTION WAS THAT WHILE AYYUBI WAS SOMEWHAT LESS WILLING TO USE FORCE IN SYRIA THAN ASAD, THERE CLEARLY HAD BEEN NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO REGARDING SYRIA'S LONG TERM GOALS. KHULAYFAWI WOULD PROBABLY SUPPORT ASAD CLOSELY IN HIS LEBANESE POLICY.

2. A HAARETZ EDITORIAL AUGUST 2 REFLECTED THE WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT THE CHANGE WILL STRENGTHEN ASAD'S DOMESTIC POSITION WHEN IT WROTE "ONLY A MILITARY PERSONALITY SUCH AS THAT OF KHULAYFAWI, ENJOYING PRESIDENT ASAD'S WHOLEHEARTED SUPPORT AND CONSIDERABLE BACKING BAATH CIRCLES AS WELL AS OTHER POLITICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SYRIAN NATIONAL FRONT, CAN FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY AT THE HEAD OF THE PRESENT SYRIAN ADMINISTRATION".

3. ISRAELI COMMENTATORS AND OFFICIALS SEE THE SYRO-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT AS A CLEAR VICTORY FOR THE SYRIANS. DEFENSE MINISTER PERES SAID ON TELEVISION JULY 30 THAT "THE AGREEMENT SEEMS TO BE A SYRIAN SUCCESS MORE THAN ONE FOR THE PLO BECAUSE THE SYRIANS DICTATED THE TERMS TO THE PLO, FORCING THEM TO ACCEPT THE CAIRO AGREEMENT ON THE ONE HAND AND THE JULY 23 AGREEMENT ON THE OTHER. THAT IS, LIMITING PLO ACTIVITIES INSIDE LEBANON AND NONINTERVENTION IN LEBANON'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PLO DEMAND THAT THE SYRIANS WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON NO LONGER HOLDS; THE SYRIANS WILL REMAIN IN LEBANON". PERES WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT "IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER THIS AGREEMENT WILL BE FULFILLED. THE BASIS OF THE ENMITY AND THE FACT THAT ALL SIDES CONTINUE TO HAVE AMMUNITION, WEAPONS AND FIGHTERS-- ALL THIS DOES NOT GUARANTEE THE CEASE-FIRE".

4. BARNEA NOTED THAT THE PLO APPARENTLY MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN SURRENDERING TO SYRIANS DEMANDS OR CONTINUED FIGHTING IN LEBANON. HIS ANALYSIS OF THE DAMASCUS AGREEMENT IS THAT IT IS A STATEMENT OF SYRIAN TERMS. THUS, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCORD IS TO BE CARRIED OUT BY ELEMENTS OF THE ARAB PEACE-KEEPING FORCES ALREADY IN PLACE (MAINLY SYRIAN). SIMILARLY, THE PLO MUST REFRAIN FROM INTERVENTION IN LEBANESE POLITICS. IF THIS LAST DEMAND WERE HONORED, BARNEA SAID, IT WOULD MEAN A SPLIT

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BETWEEN THE PLO AND THE JUMBLATT-LEFTIST COALITION. THAT SUCH A PRO-SYRIAN AGREEMENT HAD TO BE MEDIATED BY JALLUD MUST HAVE BEEN GALLING TO LIBYA, BARNEA SAID. ALTHOUGH LIBYA'S INTERESTS IN LEBANON ARE FAR FROM SYRIA'S, QADHAFI FELT HE HAD TO GO ALONG WITH ASAD BECAUSE OF THEIR MUTUAL INTEREST IN OPPOSING SADAT. ON THE FUTURE OF SYRIAN-PLO RELATIONS, BARNEA VENTURED THE VIEW THAT SYRIA WISHED NEITHER TO DESTROY THE PLO NOR EVEN TO CONTROL IT COMPLETELY, BUT

SIMPLY TO HAVE A GREATER INFLUENCE THAN ANY OTHER ARAB COUNTRY OVER THAT ORGANIZATION. SYRIA IS AWARE THAT IF IT WERE COMPLETELY TO DEMOLISH THE PLO, NEW PALESTINIAN GROUPS, SPONSORED BY OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, WOULD SPRING UP.

5. IN A SPEECH IN TEL AVIV AUGUST 2, MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL SHLOMO AVINERI REFERRED TO THE PLO AND ITS FUTURE IN THE LIGHT OF THE SYRO-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON. HE SAID THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON CONSTITUTE THE LONG TERM DANGER TO ISRAEL AND THAT EITHER OF TWO THREATS COULD OCCUR: THE CONVERSION OF LEBANON OR PART OF LEBANON INTO A PLO STRONGHOLD, OR THE ANNEXATION OF LEBANON BY SYRIA IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER. NEITHER OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS WOULD PERMIT ISRAEL TO REMAIN INDIFFERENT FOR ANY PERIOD OF TIME SO THIS REQUIRES ISRAEL TO WATCH DEVELOPMENTS CLOSELY. HE SUMMED UP: "WHATEVER THE IMMEDIATE OUTCOME OF DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON, IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE THAT THE PLO WILL REGAIN ITS FORMER POSITION AND RELATIVE INDEPENDENCE, AND THIS WEAKENING OF THE PLO IS A STABILIZING FACTOR IN THE REGION".

6. COMMENT: WHILE THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN SPAT HAS THE ISRAELIS IN THE POSITION OF A SPECTATOR AT A TENNIS MATCH, THERE IS CONSTANT AWARENESS THAT THE OUTCOME OF THE SPAT INVOLVES THEM DIRECTLY. IF THE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT WOULD RESULT IN A GREEN LIGHT FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS INTO ISRAEL, THEN AVINERI'S STATEMENT THAT ISRAEL COULD NOT "REMAIN INDIFFERENT" MIGHT SOON BE TRANSLATED INTO COUNTERACTIONS. THE WAY THE SITUATION NOW SEEMS TO BE DEVELOPING, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY, AT LEAST FROM HERE, THAT SYRIA IS PREPARED OPENLY TO ANNEX LEBANON ALTHOUGH ITS INFLUENCE THERE MAY WELL BE GREATER THAN PRE-1976. TO THE ISRAELIS THE TERRORIST THREAT IS PROBABLY MORE LIKELY, AND CERTAINLY MORE IMMEDIATELY WORRISOME.

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